

Pentecost – The Feast of Weeks (Acts 2:1-43, Lev 23:15-22)

Introduction – Pentecost. Where did it come from? How does it show up in Acts 2? Is this a Christian festival that Paul wanted to keep, or an old covenant feast day that should vanish into the other shadows and types fulfilled by Christ? The word Pentecost is only used three times in Scripture (Acts 2:1, 20:16, and 1 Cor 16:18), but did you know that the Western church has historically celebrated this day as Pentecost Sunday (one of five evangelical ‘feast days’, with Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension Day)? Why?

Pentecost: The Word (Lev 23:15-16) – Pentecost was the celebration of the Feast of Weeks. It was determined in the calendar by counting fifty days after Passover, hence the name, Pentecost. It was celebrated on the first day after seven Sabbaths following Passover, and so it was always celebrated on Sunday. It was also known as the Feast of the Harvest (Ex 23:16) for it was the feast where the firstfruits were brought in.

Pentecost: The Leavened Feast (Lev 23:17-21) – Pentecost is connected to Passover by a number of days (50). The bread at Passover is “*the bread of affliction, for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste*” (Deut 16:3), but the bread at Pentecost was leavened (Lev 23:17) and instead of one, now two loaves would be waved before the Lord along with a drink offering of wine. New grain from the spring harvest would be brought by sheaves before the Lord. Loaves were made of the finest flour with leaven, and all three sacrifices, the ascension, the sin, and finally, the peace offering were made on that day. Only Yahweh ate the ascension (whole burnt) offering, and only the priests partook of the sin offering. But everyone partook of the peace offering (Lev 7:11-34). And so, Pentecost included a feast of a sacrificial animal, bread and wine, and was a picture of the communal meal with God and His people. Pentecost was not a remembrance of the affliction of Egypt, but of the spread of the blessing of God upon the land for His people.

Pentecost and the Law - The Feast of Weeks was understood to take place fifty days after Passover in remembrance of God establishing His covenant with His people after bringing them out of Egypt. At Mt. Sinai, God gave the people His law, written on tablets of stone, and on that day, 3,000 people died (Ex 32:28). We see Joshua establishing what looks like the Feast of Weeks and another giving of the law in Josh 8:30-35 and Pentecost became a time when the law was regularly read to the people. Later, God promised the people that the Spirit would come and write the law of God on their hearts in the New Covenant (Jer 31:33). At Pentecost, around 30AD, amidst wind and fire again (signs of the Shekinah glory), the Holy Spirit filled the house where the apostles and disciples of Jesus were gathered, “...and that day, about 3,000 souls were added to them” (Acts 2:41).

Pentecost and the Word – But that is not the only reversal that took place on that day. In Gen 10 we have the “table of nations” and in Gen 11 we have the story of the tower of Babel, where God divided the people with diverse languages so that they would not understand one another. In Gen 12, Abraham is promised that through Him, all of these nations would one day be blessed. Now, on Pentecost, around AD 30, the Seed of Abraham sends the Holy Spirit to be a blessing to all the nations. The New Covenant will have no bounds of territory or tongue. And the sign of this blessing was the gift of tongues to all of the people. The gospel could be clearly understood in every tongue represented at the Pentecost gathering. The spread of the good news of Jesus Christ had begun. The firstfruits were brought in by the preaching of Peter and offered to the Lord in baptism. The nations are reunited in the church, and the enemies of Christ are made into a footstool (Acts 2:33-36 referencing Psalm 110).

The Gift of the Holy Spirit – We are “Pentecostals” in the sense that we believe in the person and power of the Holy Spirit, granted to each believer in Jesus Christ. We believe that the Holy Spirit brings repentance and soft hearts as promised in Ezek 36:26-27 and seen in Acts 2:37-41, and we see that He does this in the preaching of the Word. We believe that the Spirit is and acts as a seal upon men for their promised redemption in Christ (Eph 1:13-14). We believe and pray that the Lord would keep His Word and give the Holy Spirit to those who ask (Luke 11:5-13).

The Work of the Spirit Upon the Believer – We are to be filled with the Spirit, manifested in the speaking to one another in psalms (Eph 5:18-21). We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit, but instead let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from us (Eph 4:30-31). Do we live as those who have had the law of God written upon our hearts?

The Work of the Spirit Upon the World – The Feast of Weeks was a feast of the firstfruits, but the whole harvest was the Lord’s. The Spirit was poured out at Pentecost and three-thousand were saved, but all the nations were promised. The Spirit has come to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 6:8), a world Christ has come to save (John 3:17). Do we see the gathering in of the nations?

It seems that, like Christmas and Easter, Pentecost would be an appropriate special day of celebration for the Christian church.